

July 28, 2019

Not only was this day my mumbledy-mulble birthday, but it also marked the end of my family's 54<sup>th</sup> annual trip to Parker Pond in Franklin County, Maine.

In the olden times, my maternal Grandfather Yoos, (pilot in Korea and Vietnam) was friends with a man named Bill Nurse who ran a fishing guide business off of an island on Parker Pond. After Korea, Bill asked my grandfather if he wanted to come up fishing, and one summer, he agreed. Grandpa Yoos brought his son Chuck along, and they both fell in love with the place. Every summer since then, a group of men in my family have made the trek from miscellaneous parts of America to Maine for a week of fishing, drinking, and solving the world's problems from a tiny island on a relatively small lake.

As most of you can probably imagine, over that kind of timeframe, some truly amazing events have transpired. In one case, a snapping turtle was eating the fish that we had left overnight in the water on stringers, so in a moment of pure brilliance, ten large treble hooks were baited with fish guts and left in the water. At around 0500 the next morning, my very proper and very dapper Grandpa Johnson (pilot in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam) went down to the dock to shave sans his eyeglasses. While kneeling down to reach the water, he came eyeball to eyeball with a very pissed off turtle with a few hooks in his face

Grandpa Johnson came flying back into camp screaming, "Charlie, you got him!" Now in those days, we all slept in one giant tent we called the Hotel California. Upon hearing the screaming a Chinese fire drill ensued and twelve men tried to get out of one tent door at the same time. It was chaos. When they got to the dock, my Grandpa Yoos hauled the turtle onto the dock, grabbed an axe, and chopped down on his neck. This masterful tactical decision resulted in absolutely no damage being done to the turtle and all of the hooks being knocked out of his mouth. The turtle was now angry, surrounded by panicked people, and on the loose.

He slid into the water and swam under a boat in which my uncle perched. Calling upon his track and field talent, my uncle grabbed an oar, posed like a Zeus about to hurl a thunderbolt, and threw the oar, paddle first, at the turtle. It hit him just right and broke his neck, killing him instantly. His shell was nearly three feet from front to back and hung in my very prim Grandma's yard for years. She was so proud.

I've been going to Parker since 1992, though I missed quite a few years for silly things like deployments and the birth of a child, but this year I was able to find the time away from work and my minions, and got to spend a glorious week completely unplugged from everything. In this particular case, 'everything' is defined as 'plumbing, electricity, wi-fi, and women.' For a week or so, it's perfect.

This year was exceptional, even on our scale. The fishing was a bit slower than is typical (I caught nine fish over 2 pounds in a week), but we caught far more smallmouth than normal. Over the past ten years or so, the largemouth population has exploded, and we were getting concerned that they

had forced the smallmouth out, so getting to hook into fish that I believe are pound-for-pound the best fighters out there was incredible.

We've taken groups as large as 18 and as small as four, but this year there were five of us. It seemed to be just the right number, as we've got five people worth of boat space, and renting from Castle Island in Belgrade Lakes (half an hour away) is complicated and expensive. This year, we just showed up, dropped the boats in the water, and got to it.

It's a cheap trip, so we splurge on food, and the menu has become sacrosanct over the years. We buy live lobsters when we get into Augusta for the first night, and then it's barbeque chicken, filet mignon, skirt steak, chicken filet sandwiches, a second night of lobster, and a leftover-mashup the night before we leave.

Some of my best memories have been made on Parker Pond, and I've had some of my most significant conversations. It's not that men don't talk to each other about heavy things or about our feelings; it's that we have to be doing something which precludes eye contact while we're talking about them. Fishing is the perfect medium for provoking big, important, and thoughtful conversations between men who trust each other. Most of the time, though, we're constantly busting each other's balls – as is proper.

Every night, we'd come back to camp for a fire, cigars, and booze. This year was a Padron Presidente with Talisker week for me, but Macallan and Glenlivet made an appearance in my copper camp mug as well. In our shit-face-hammered state, we (liberals and conservatives alike) were able to solve everything from the North Korean crisis to the so-called southern border of the United States. Unfortunately, no one remembers much in the way of what we came up with, so we'll have to leave those issues to our 'betters' to sort out in the absence of our genius.

With two tiny little savages in my care, I'm not sure I'll get to go every year, so I certainly cherish the opportunities I do get. As the calendar ticks by, I look forward to the time when my son is old enough to come to Maine (he'll be the first of the fourth generation) and make his own memories.